DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL BRUCE REIDER, DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR ARMY LEADERSHIP VIA CONFERENCE CALL TIME: 10:00 A.M. EDT DATE: TUESDAY, APRIL 22, 2008

(Note:  Please refer to www.dod.mil for more information.)

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): There's still a couple others who are going to dial in.  They can -- if they join us late, we'll get them caught up as we get going.

And with us on the line is Colonel Bruce Reider, who is the director for the Center for Army Leadership at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Combined Arms Center.  Colonel Reider, thank you for joining us this morning.  And we appreciate you taking the time to be with us.

COL. REIDER:  Thanks much, Jack.  I appreciate this opportunity. And good morning to everyone out there.

Q    Morning.

MR. HOLT:  And someone else just joined us.  Who's there?  Q     It's Grim of blackfive.

MR. HOLT:  All right, Grim.  Okay.  We're just getting started.

And Colonel Reider, if you've got an opening statement for us, the floor is yours, sir.

COL. REIDER:  Sure do.  Thanks, Jack.

Well, for the gentleman who just joined us, I'm Colonel Bruce Reider, the director of the Combined Arms Center, Center for Army Leadership out here at Forth Leavenworth, Kansas.  And first of all, I'd like to say thanks for the opportunity to discuss with you folks a program that I think has the potential to fundamentally change Army culture, and that program is what we call the Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback Program, or I'll use the acronym, MSAF, this morning.

Before I start, I've got a couple of folks from my office with me: Lieutenant Colonel Judy Price; she's the MSAF program manager. And I have Ms. Sonja Moyer (sp) with me; she is the strategic communications officer for my organization.

By way of an opening -- I'll try to keep it very simple -- I'm going to use the five "w"s that we use in the military and how.  So first of all, what is

this MSAF program?  Well, it's a program that is designed to provide individual feedback to leaders related to the eight competencies of Army leadership that we have described in our doctrine.  It is similar to 360 degree assessment programs that you're probably familiar with, in that the feedback is provided by superiors, peers, subordinates and others.  Unlike traditional 360 degree assessment programs, MSAF does not necessarily require feedback from all these groups, hence the use of the term "multi-source" as opposed to 360.  And what I mean is that the feedback could be from two of the groups, to provide 180 degree feedback, or it could be from three of the groups, 270 degree feedback, or from all the groups for complete 360 assessment.

Why are we doing this?  Well, I know General Caldwell was on the blogger recently and he talked about Field Manual 3.0 operations.  And if you look in FM 3.0, it describes the challenges of the operational environment in this era of persistent conflict.  And we believe that the types of leaders required to be successful are those leaders who are agile and adaptive, and we think that self-awareness is a prerequisite to becoming an agile and adaptive leader.  And really, the purpose of MSAF is to enhance an individual's self-awareness.

Who?  Well, MSAF applies to all Army leaders, grades E-6 and above, all cohorts -- and what I mean by cohorts is officers to include warrant officers, noncommissioned officers and DA civilians.

It also applies to the Reserve component.  So this is a comprehensive, Army-wide program.

By way of how are we going to do this, the MSAF program is a web- based assessment.  And the assessment instruments that we use have been -- we validated those through pilot testing.  They're scientifically valid measures of the eight competencies of Army leadership.  Once an individual receives an assessment, they'll receive a personalized individual feedback report with the results of their assessment.  Those feedback reports will be maintained electronically, in an electronic folder, if you will, that will only be accessible by the individual.  Also in that folder, the individual can place their personalized individual development plans that they will develop as a strategy to modify their behavior.

A couple points to stress here.  These are very important.  The assessments will all be anonymous, so the individual receiving an assessment will not know, necessarily, who is providing the feedback, because of the number of people that will be asked to provide feedback.  So  first, the assessments are anonymous.  Second, the results are confidential.  It is up to the individual to decide who he wants to share his results with.  And I also need to stress that this program is only for developmental purposes.  It is not to evaluate performance, so it will not provide any input to our performance evaluation system.

Just a couple other points to make.  I mentioned this notion of anonymous and confidential and it's not used for evaluation purposes. The only person who can access the feedback is the individual, and it's their choice who they want to share the information with. However, we have included a coaching feature in the program, and it's really a three-pronged approach.  We'll have a pool of what we call virtual coaches available telephonically or electronically through e- mail.  We'll also use the faculty and cadre at our schools to provide coaching for students when they come through a professional military education course, or civilian education course, and then there's a self-coaching

capability for those individuals who don't want to share their information or they don't necessarily need much assistance interpreting their results or creating their own individual plan.

Okay.  In terms of where -- I said this is a comprehensive program. We're going to do this in all domains of leader development. What I mean by that is the institutional domain.  So an individual will receive an assessment prior to attending a professional military    education or civilian education course. It'll be linked to the attendance.  So before they go, they'll receive an assessment.  So when they show up at the school, they will have their assessment and have the faculty and cadre available to provide coaching if they desire.

When -- well, let me go back.  The participation -- this is a mandatory program, and this is, I think, another important point. Similar type programs that the Army has used in the past have really been voluntary programs if an individual wanted to participate.  This is going to be a program that will be mandated by the Army and it will be mandated by DA policy.

In terms of when an individual would receive or participate in a program -- really, there's two pieces to this.

First of all, an individual's going to get an assessment through this program about every three to four years throughout their career.  We think that's probably enough time to adjust behavior if they choose to do so, but it's not too frequently to become a burden.

During that three- to four-year time period, really an individual will receive an assessment about every three or closer to the three- year point earlier in their career, during the more formulative stages of development, and the timeline will move closer to about every four years later in a career.

And then I guess following, the thing I'd like to say is we have been working on this program for a number of years now, at least going back through -- the idea came about around the 2000 time frame.  This program's been validated, or a program like this, by every leader development study that the Army has done since that time frame.  We conducted a two-year pilot program to test and evaluate this system, and we are now ready to go initial operational capable on or about the 1st of May.  We are very, very close to making this a reality for the Army, and then we will be fully capable on or about the 1st of October.  And we believe that this program will, in fact, increase self-awareness and ultimately result in Army leaders who are more agile and adaptive.

And with that, I'll be glad to answer our questions and discuss the background to the program.

MR. HOLT:  All right.  Thank you, Colonel Reider.

David, you were first on line, so why don't you get us started.

Q    Great.  Thanks.

Colonel, this is David Axe from War is Boring.  So this is a totally voluntary program.  In other words, I mean, you could just -- people could just not ever use it at all.

COL. REIDER:  Not exactly.  It is a mandatory program, so you will have to participate.  Now, how you choose to use your results and who you share those with, that is completely up to the individual.

Q     Okay.  You know, having been briefly in a corporate environment that used the 360 degrees assessment kind of program, I could see this being really irritating a lot of folks, because it    seems like there's the potential here for, like, almost a mob model of -- not evaluation, but of -- what are you calling it -- feedback. It's anonymous and it seems to take in a lot of different input from different directions.

I take it the Army's taken a hard look at some of the potential pitfalls, right?

COL. REIDER:  Yeah, absolutely.  And I'm glad you ask this question, because it gives me a chance to touch on a little bit of the background of this pilot program.

When General Wallace was the commander of the Combined Arms Center, he is the one that directed the Center for Army Leadership to conduct the pilot program, and his guidance was to conduct this pilot program in what he felt was a crucible event.  So we ran the pilot at the National Training Center -- actually, the Combat Training Centers. Most of the pilot work was at the National Training Center.  But we ran it at the Combat Training Centers, and we looked at -- we did it in 14 different unit rotations.  And in the pilot program, we had over 2,000 leaders that were -- that actually received assessment and over 23,000 individuals that participated in the program to provide those assessments.  And the results that we got were around 98 percent of the individuals that participated in this program felt that this was a very valuable and worthwhile program, and were willing to make adjustments to their behavior based on the feedback they have received.

So I guess that is -- that's probably the first point to make on this.  And I'll -- let me just share with you a couple anecdotes that we have from some folks that have gone through the program.

This is from a battalion commander.  He said, "As for the 360 degree survey, I must admit that at first I was skeptical.  It was yet another tasking on an already overfull plate.  However, it was fantastic.  I cannot recommend it highly enough.  I found the survey extremely useful to me personally, and also as an extremely useful tool for my leadership."

Let me give you one other, from an NCO's perspective.  This is from a first sergeant, who said, "Nobody ever tells you if you screwed up.  They just talk behind your back and assign the mission to someone else.  With the 360 assessment, you get the truth.  This ain't just another survey; it's essential."

So I guess my point here is that people who participate in this program are strong advocates of the program.  And I like to look at it like this.  With any sort of a thing, you always have about, you know, a small percentage that are the true believers who buy into the program regardless.  And then you always have a small number of folks who are the skeptics at the other end that will never buy into a program.  It's the 80 percent or so in the middle; that once those people participate, they all seem to shift towards the buy into the program side of the house.

So I -- that's a long answer to your question, but I appreciate the opportunity to expand upon it.    Q     Okay.   Thanks.

MR. HOLT:  Okay.  Grim?

Q     Yes.  Good morning.  Earlier in your statement you had mentioned that part of your methodology was, as I recall your quote, "scientifically valid."  Could you talk a little bit about exactly what science is involved and what states you've -- what steps you've taken to ensure that it is in fact valid?

COL. REIDER:  Yeah, I can -- I could answer a little bit of that. I've got some research psychologists who work for me.  Unfortunately, my lead research psychologist is on vacation this week and not available.  But you know, these are folks who have experience in this sort of work.  In fact, my lead researcher's been in this business for about 26 years.  So -- and I'm not a scientist, but let me just try to touch on this.

There are eight competencies of army leadership.  And the way that the instruments are set up is, they ask multiple questions from different angles, about each of the competencies, to ensure that there is multiple avenues of feedback on and assessment of any one particular competency.

And I'll ask Lieutenant Colonel Price if she has anything that she would like to add to that.  But that's about the best I could do at this point.

Judi.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JUDITH PRICE (program manager, MSAF, U.S. Army):  As far as the scientific validation of it, through the pilot with the 14 iterations, we used the assessments.  And if we found that there were issues with a particular question or an item group, we would address that and we would update the assessments.  And they would be tested on the next group.

And so they were scientifically validated, through the results that we got from all of the participants and the leaders that were in the assessment groups.

Q     Okay.

So just so that that's a little less theoretical, could you talk me through an example, where you found problems, that you adjusted it, and how you determined that there were problems?

COL. REIDER:  We're thinking here for a second.  Hold on.

Q     I like thinking.

COL. REIDER:  We're discussing one of the things because neither of us were here in the organization when the pilot was conducted.

But what Judy is telling me is that we had one of the competencies -- the questions did not really get to what we were looking for from the competency.  So we had to go back and rewrite the question, to make the question more straightforward, to really get to what we wanted to know about that particular competency.

And I'm sorry I can't give you more information than that. That's about the best I could do right now.    Q    Fair enough.

MR. HOLT:  And maybe we could follow up here a little bit later on in another few weeks.  Maybe when your research scientist comes back, we can follow up.

COL. REIDER:  Hey, that would be great.

MR. HOLT:  Okay.

Okay and David, any other questions?

Q    Me again?

MR. HOLT:  Yes.

Q    No.

I'm still a little bit skeptical of the value of this kind of assessment.  I understand that you've got this metric that's this quantifiable feedback, from those who were assessed, saying -- 80 percent of them saying that they were really into it.  I'm sorry, 98 percent of them saying they were really into it.

It still seems like this kind of assessment might actually serve to suppress creative thinking by encouraging sort of homogenous -- like a homogenizing effect from this kind of feedback potentially. Was that ever a fear in developing this program?

COL. REIDER:  No, not really.

Again as I stressed earlier, the assessments are anonymous.  And I could talk a little bit of detail about that.  But essentially we have set up the parameters in the program where you cannot receive an assessment without having a minimum number of folks provide the assessment.

So a certain number will be invited to provide assessments.  But you won't -- your assessment will not be complete until a minimum number of assessments are received, to ensure the confidentiality. And since the -- or the anonymity of the assessors.

And in terms of the confidentiality, the individual doesn't have to share this with anybody.  So it's an opportunity for those folks, who work around this individual, other than their immediate rater or superior, to provide their feedback on how they see this leader behaving, you know, in the execution of their duties.

So I think, if anything, this is going to promote -- I don't know about creativity.  I mean that's a whole different subject.  But I certainly think it's going to lead or produce a leader who is more aware of their strengths and weaknesses in terms of the eight competencies, of a leader, that the Army feels is important.    Now, whether that self-awareness will lead to greater creativity, it's really hard to say.

I would say it will probably lead more to greater creativity than it would to a more homogenous population of groupthink.

Q    Really?  That seems kind of counterintuitive to me.  And earlier you had said that it was critical to have agile and adaptive leaders, you know, in this new era of persistent conflict, but I'm just trying to understand how this kind of assessment makes more agile and adaptive leaders.

COL. REIDER:  Well, let's take for example the eight competencies.  And I won't go into them in detail, but they're very simple.  We group them into three categories:  leads, develops and achieves.  And under "leads", we have direct leadership as a competency; this is the traditional leadership that we have always exercised in a chain of command with people that work for us.  We have a competency of influencing others outside of the chain of command, which I think we can all agree is becoming more and more important as we work in an environment of joint interagency, intergovernmental and multinational -- with those sort of partners who don't necessarily respond to traditional direct leadership.

So we have direct leadership, the use of influence or what I call indirect leadership.  We have leading by example and we have communicating; those fall into the "leads" category.  Then, a leader has three competencies under "develops".  They're responsible for developing themselves, developing their subordinates and developing their organization.  And then finally, for "achieves", they need to accomplish the mission.

So if a leader receives feedback from individuals other than their boss regarding, let's say, their ability to use indirect leadership and influence others and they way they interact with those folks, I would think that that is nothing but a good thing for them to have that sort of feedback to know how they are viewed by people that they are trying to influence, either peers, others or subordinates above and beyond their superiors.

Q    Okay.  All right, thanks.

MR. HOLT:  Okay, anyone else?  Anything else?

Q    Just one last question from Grim.  I'm not quite as skeptical of the program.  I see David Axe's point, that when you -- especially if somebody's really trying something new, that's different    for how people have been trained, that they may get a lot of negative feedback upfront because people think they don't know what they're doing, but then they're really the one who has the right idea.  On the other hand, I can see that adding feedback from people below you is a really important thing that the Army needs to do.  And so my question is:  Are you going to be editing out the profanity?  (Laughter.)

COL. REIDER:  Actually, yes.  (Chuckles.)  And that's another one of those things that involves a bit of science.  The way the code in the program is that it will pick up certain words -- now, it's a learning sort of program, so we put in the blacklist words initially and then it will continue to grow.  But the short answer is yes, it will identify profanity and certain language and will filter that out.

Q    So you're doing that automatically to protect the confidentiality or the -- (struggles with pronunciation of the next word) -- anonymity?

COL. REIDER:  That's correct.

I'm glad somebody else has a hard time with that word too.

Yeah, exactly.

Q     All right.  Thank you.

MR. HOLT:  Okay.  All right.  And you know, I usually don't comment, but one of the things that kind of strikes me is this kind of goes back to what the first sergeant's quote was:  It's not just another survey; it's essential, because, you know, you have -- one of the first things that -- one of the biggest -- what's the word I'm looking for here? -- components or accelerators of change is knowing what to change and how to change, and that feedback is essential.

COL. REIDER:  Yeah, absolutely.  And if I may, I have one other quote here.  This is from a platoon sergeant, and I really like to get the NCO perspective, because they'll tell you exactly what they think. And again, this is a quote from a platoon sergeant who participated in the program.  Quote, "This is the first time that my subordinates ever assessed my leadership, showed me I didn't care enough about families. Platoon leader counseling has been a joke up to this point in my career.  Without 360 assessment, you'd never really know how soldiers felt about you," end quote.

And I think those sort of comments are very, very powerful and strong endorsements for the program.

I do understand the skepticism.  This is a significant change. As I said very early on, this has the potential to fundamentally change the culture of the Army.  Up until now, we have relied entirely on the formal feedback from our superiors or our raters -- really, that top-down feedback -- on our performance and potential regarding our job and our character and our leadership abilities.  And now you have an opportunity not tied to performance evaluation to receive feedback from other individuals to help you shape your behavior and become a more effective, agile and adaptive leader.

MR. HOLT:  All right, sir.  Well, thank you very much.  If there are no other questions --  Q     (Inaudible.)

MR. HOLT:  Okay.  We will in fact thank you, Colonel Bruce Reider, who is the director for the Center for Army Leadership at the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.  Thank you very much for being with us, sir, this morning, and perhaps we can engage in this discussion again in a few weeks.

COL. REIDER:  Very good.  Thanks, Jack, and thanks, gentlemen.  I appreciate the tough questions you threw at me.

MR. HOLT:  All right, sir.  Thank you very much.

Q     Thanks.

COL. REIDER:  All right.  Good day.

END.